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This is a pre-publication version of an article which is to be published in 2016 as part of a special issue of *Textual Practice* entitled 'Deliberations: The Journals of Roland Barthes'. It is being made available publicly in line with the publisher's 'Green Open Access' policy. For the authoritative text, please see the published version.

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## Introduction

### Deliberations: The Journals of Roland Barthes

Neil Badmington

On 12 November 1915, André Gide used the pages of his journal to complain about a social gathering from which he had just returned:

I had had the absurd weakness to accept an invitation to dine at Mme Edwards's with the Philippe Berthelots; I come away quite upset. I don't understand very well why people invite me: not famous enough for it to be flattering to have me; my conversation remains desperately dull, and there is nothing to get out of me.<sup>1</sup>

After describing the *soirée* in devilish detail, Gide ended his account by recalling the evening's unfortunate conclusion:

The auto that was taking me home to Auteuil ran out of gasoline two kilometres from the Villa, so that I had to walk in the dark and under a driving rain. I was unable to close my eyes all night long, and all today I shall go about with a headache and a grudge against yesterday's hosts and against myself.<sup>2</sup>

On the same day, around 200 miles from Auteuil, Roland Barthes was born. Even though Gide would come to be a figure of influence in his life as a writer, it seemed for some time that Barthes held a sort of grudge against the journal as a form.<sup>3</sup> Andy Stafford notes on the opening page of his recent critical biography, for instance, that 'Barthes was famously suspicious of the writer's diary or notebook', and, as Sam Ferguson points out in his contribution to this special issue, 'Barthes's article "Deliberation" constituted his only substantial, published discussion of the *journal intime*, as well as the only publication of his diaries in his lifetime'.<sup>4</sup>

‘Deliberation’, which first appeared in *Tel Quel* in the winter of 1979, begins uncertainly. ‘I’ve never kept a journal’, Barthes writes, ‘ – or, rather, I’ve never known if I should keep one’.<sup>5</sup> After this shifting statement – Éric Marty calls it ‘sly’ or ‘underhand’ [*retorse*]<sup>6</sup> – Barthes announces that he is not

attempting any kind of analysis of the ‘Journal’ genre (there are books on the subject), but only a personal deliberation, intended to afford a practical decision: Should I keep a journal *with a view to publication*? Can I make the journal into a ‘work’?<sup>7</sup>

Testing the waters, ‘Deliberation’ proceeds to reproduce a number of entries from Barthes’s diaries, but these are followed by remarks which quickly cast doubt upon the worth of the intimate observations. Such writing, we read:

is stricken [...] with a kind of insidious disease, negative characteristics – deceptive and disappointing, as I shall try to say [...]

How to keep a Journal without egotism? That is precisely the question which keeps me from writing one (for I have had just about enough egotism).<sup>8</sup>

Invoking Mallarmé’s distinction between the Book and the Album – a division discussed at greater length by Sam Ferguson and Diana Knight in their contributions to this volume – Barthes declares that the journal, as a type of Album, is inferior and ‘unnecessary’, a ‘minor mania of writing, whose necessity vanishes in the trajectory leading from the entry produced to the entry reread’.<sup>9</sup>

Barthes died several months after the appearance of ‘Deliberation’. The years since then have revealed that the short, dismissive text was concealing a fondness for diary-writing. The posthumous publication in 1985 of *Incidents* brought to light an intimate journal entitled ‘Soirées de Paris’ which covered August and September 1979, and which Barthes had begun immediately after sending ‘Deliberation’ to *Tel Quel*.<sup>10</sup> More striking still was the publication in 2009 of *Journal de deuil* and *Carnets du voyage en Chine*, two much longer diaries kept by Barthes following the death of his mother in 1977 and during a trip to China in 1974, respectively.<sup>11</sup> Meanwhile, the arrival in 2015 of Tiphaine Samoyault’s definitive biography of Barthes revealed that further diaries lie in the archive,

unpublished and largely unseen.<sup>12</sup> (Diana Knight's essay in these pages engages with some of this restricted material.) It is not clear if these will ever enter the public domain.

This special issue of *Textual Practice* concerns itself with the present implications of Roland Barthes's journals. How, the essays ask in different ways, do these diaries invite us to reconsider familiar aspects of Barthes's work? What do they allow us to see for the first time? What is their relation, as intimate writings not necessarily meant for publication, to the works whose appearance Barthes authorised during his lifetime? Where and how do they fit in his ever-expanding *oeuvre*? How do they relate to each other across moment and mood? Why might they call for deliberations?

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Seventeen years after describing his walk home through the rain to Auteuil, Gide worried about the effect of publishing his journal:

Some time ago this notebook ceased to be what it ought to be: an intimate confidant.

The perspective of an even partial publication of my *Journal*, as an appendix to the volumes of my *Oeuvres complètes*, has distorted its meaning; and also fatigue or laziness, and the dislocation of my life, fear of losing what I ought to have put into books or articles which, through some lack of confidence or other, I despaired of writing satisfactorily. Even these lines I am writing without assurance.<sup>13</sup>

The posthumous publication of Barthes's diaries has been controversial, but we have no way of knowing for certain if he would have shared Gide's anxiety about a 'distortion of meaning' overshadowing the passage to availability. In this light, the essays gathered here concern themselves simply with meaning, with the weight of deliberations whose life can no longer be private.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> André Gide, *Journals 1889-1949*, ed. and trans. Justin O'Brien (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), p. 229.

<sup>2</sup> Gide, *Journals*, p. 231.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the importance of Gide to Barthes, see Sam Ferguson's essay in the present volume. See also Chapter 4 of Tiphaine Samoyault, *Roland Barthes: Biographie* (Paris: Seuil, 2015).

<sup>4</sup> Andy Stafford, *Roland Barthes* (London: Reaktion, 2015), p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Deliberation', in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 359.

<sup>6</sup> Éric Marty, *Roland Barthes, la littérature et le droit à la mort* (Paris: Seuil, 2010), p. 13. My translation. Richard Howard's English rendering of Barthes's 'Délibération' does not include the dedication found at the beginning of the original text: 'pour Éric Marty'. See Roland Barthes, 'Délibération', in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, rev. ed. (Paris: Seuil, 2002), 5 vols, vol. 5, p. 668.

<sup>7</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', p. 360.

<sup>8</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', pp. 369-370.

<sup>9</sup> Barthes, 'Deliberation', p. 370.

<sup>10</sup> Available in English as Roland Barthes, 'Evenings in Paris', in *Incidents*, trans. Teresa Lavender Fagan (Calcutta: Seagull Books, 2010), pp. 131-172.

<sup>11</sup> Available in English as *Mourning Diary: October 26, 1977 - September 15, 1979*, ed. Nathalie Léger, trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, 2010) and *Travels in China*, trans. Andrew Brown (Cambridge: Polity, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> See, for instance, Samoyault, *Roland Barthes: Biographie*, p. 651.

<sup>13</sup> Gide, *Journals*, pp. 540-541.